IT'S OUR BUSINESS

Alcohol, drugs and gambling in the workplace

Substance Use and Gambling in the Workplace, 2002: A Replication Study

How much are alcohol, drugs and tobacco used by Alberta workers and how often does this happen in the workplace? How often do Alberta workers gamble and do they gamble at work? Do certain industries have more employees who drink, take drugs, smoke or gamble? How much do these behaviours cost the Alberta workplace? What programs and services do organizations have to support workers with addiction problems?

To answer these questions, AADAC asked 2,836 employees, 755 employers and 88 union representatives about their attitudes and perceptions about gambling and the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs in the workplace. In 1992, AADAC gathered similar information, but only about alcohol and drugs.

The new information gathered in 2002 will be useful to people who want to learn about the extent of substance use and gambling in the workplace, identify emerging trends in workplace consumption and gambling activities, and promote AADAC's programs and services to help prevent the development of, and reduce the harms associated with, gambling and the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

HOW MUCH AND WHO USES

Alcohol use

Alcohol is still the most used substance by Alberta workers and this has not changed much in the last 10 years. In 2002, 81% of Alberta workers said they drank alcohol in the past month, a rate very close to the 80% who reported drinking in 1992. Drinking patterns have changed since 1992. More Alberta workers said they drank monthly or less (27% compared to 19% in 1992) and fewer workers said they drank two to four times a month (26% compared to 34% in 1992).

Most Alberta workers did not drink in ways that would be harmful to them. One in 10 (10%) drank in ways that could be harmful: for example, high levels of drinking each day, repeated drinking to intoxication, drinking that causes physical or mental harm, or drinking that causes the person to become dependent. One per cent of Alberta workers could probably be considered dependent on alcohol. These problem drinkers were often young single men.

There were certain job qualities related to higher alcohol use among Alberta workers and these are: travelling for work, working at a remote job site, working long hours including overtime, and work that involved entertaining or being entertained by clients, suppliers or other business contacts. Job stress, job satisfaction and seeing work as a "career" versus a "job" were not related to higher alcohol use.

About one in 10 (11%) of Alberta workers also drank while at work during the past year. This equals over 184,000 of Alberta's 1.7 million workers. Almost all of those who drank at work did so less than once a week, and only 1% of all workers said they had any work-related problems because of their drinking.

Utilities, forestry/mining and public administration had the highest rates of alcohol use among workers. Agriculture and social services had the lowest rates. Alcohol use at work was highest for workers in the finance/insurance/real estate and other services industries. At-risk alcohol use was highest among workers in the construction and wholesale/retail trade industries.

The presence of alcohol in the workplace and drinking by employees has changed since 1992. Alcohol was less available at work, at functions or during special occasions at work, and workers were less likely to drink at lunch and after work. However, workers were more likely in 2002 than in 1992 to get invitations to drink by co-workers, supervisor/managers, or customer/clients. Invitations to drink by suppliers went down.

Drug use

Drug use by Alberta workers went up during the past 10 years from 6% to 10%. However, cannabis (marijuana, hash) was the only drug whose use went up. Very few workers (1% or less for each) used cocaine, hallucinogens, stimulants, opiates and other street drugs and this did not change since 1992. Drug use was highest in the construction and manufacturing/processing industries.

The Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST) is a tool used to find out about problem drug use. Most workers who used drugs said they did not have any problems or had only a few problems with their drug use. About 2% of Alberta workers had problems with their drug use that would be seen as drug abuse or dependence. Problem drug users were usually young single men. Workers who had problems such as depression, anxiety or other mental health problems and/or people off work because of health problems or injuries were also likely to have problems with drugs.

Only one per cent of workers used drugs while at work in 2002. Even so, this works out to be about 16,700 Alberta workers and more than one third (44%, or about 7,300) of this number used drugs at work at least once a week. About 2% of Alberta workers used drugs within four hours of coming to work. Only 0.2% of workers said they had problems at work because of their drug use. Most workers (90%) did not think that drug use was acceptable in their workplace.

Workers also gave information about different types of medications. Most (88%) used medications during the past year, but did not use daily. As would be expected, medications were more likely to be used by people who had been off work because of an injury or illness. See Table 1 for the kinds of medications used.

TABLE 1: Medication use among Alberta employees: 2002

MEDICATION USE IN PAST YEAR	YES	NO
	88%	12%
MEDICATION TYPE	**USED IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS**	**DAILY USE**
OTC* painkillers (e.g. Tylenol®)	74%	3%
Cough, cold, sinus or allergy medication	59%	3%
Prescription painkillers	15%	2%
Sleeping pills	7%	0.7%
Tranquillizers (e.g., Ativan®)	2%	0.2%
OTC* stimulants (e.g., "wake-up" pills)	2%	0.1%
Anti-depressants/mood stabilizers	9%	7%

Tobacco use

Information about tobacco use by Alberta workers was collected for the first time in 2002. One third of workers (30%) smoked or used tobacco within the past month and 27% smoked cigarettes on a daily basis. About 13% of Alberta workers smoked more than 11 cigarettes per day. The heaviest smokers were often young single males.

Over 368,000 workers (22%) said they used tobacco at work. Employees in the construction, wholesale/retail trade, transportation, and upstream oil/gas industries were most likely to use tobacco. Employees in the education, social services and agriculture industries were least likely to use tobacco.

Half of employers (53%) allowed tobacco use on the premises. This happened most often in outdoor industries (forestry/mining, construction, agriculture and upstream oil/gas) and least often in indoor industries (hospitals/health care, education, social services, public administration).

Gambling

Alberta workers were asked about their gambling for the first time in 2002. Two thirds of Alberta workers (66%) gambled and only about 1% did so in a way that would be considered problem gambling according to a tool called the Canadian Problem Gambling Index. Almost no workers (0.1%) reported that they had any work-related problems because of their gambling.

Workers in the utilities, hospitals/health care, public administration, and finance, insurance and real estate industries were most likely to report gambling, while agriculture, education and social services workers were least likely to report gambling.

One third (30%) gambled while at work in 2002 in the past year, which would equal about 502,000 Alberta workers. More than one quarter of these (107,000) gambled weekly and a similar number gambled together after work (22%) and thought that gambling was socially acceptable (23%).

So what do these facts tell us about Alberta workers? While most Albertans do not drink, use drugs or tobacco or gamble in harmful ways and most do not drink or use drugs at work, those few workers who do so are cause for concern.

For more information about alcohol, drug or gambling in the workplace, please refer to the Workplace Information Series brochures, "The Basics: Alcohol, Other Drugs and Gambling" and "An Addiction in the Family: What It Means for the Workplace."

IMPACTS AND COST OF SUBSTANCE USE AND GAMBLING IN THE ALBERTA WORKPLACES

Substance abuse and problem gambling in the workplace represents a major problem that can affect safety and productivity at work and also costs the Alberta economy. The study used workers' own reports of missed time and lost productivity because of alcohol, drugs and gambling in 2002 to develop an estimate of how much this costs the Alberta economy. Alberta workers missed almost four million hours from work—the equivalent of $74 million—as a result of gambling ($7 million) or the use of alcohol ($51 million) or illicit drugs ($16 million). While this might seem like a lot of money, it is only a partial estimate of the cost of worker substance use and problem gambling. It does not include a number of other costs. Employers reported on other costs, such as lost production because of employee absenteeism, (27% up from 22% in 1992), cost of temporary workers (18% up from 8% in 1992) and wages paid to absent workers (15% down from 16% in 1992).

Employers and union representatives continue to be concerned about employee alcohol and drug use since 1992 and expressed new concerns about employee tobacco use and gambling. In fact, they were more concerned about the seriousness of employee tobacco use (31%) than alcohol use (20%), drug use (13%) and gambling (9%) for their organizations. Concerns about employee alcohol use and drug use rose from 1992 (10% and 7% respectively).

What did employers in the study report about incidents related to employee substance use? Employers said that in the past month they were aware of employees missing a day of work (15% of employers), employees arriving late for work (16% of employers) or employees' work pace (10% of employers) slowing because of alcohol or drug use. Hardly any employers (1%) were aware of incidents where employee alcohol or drug use caused injuries to the employee, co-workers or others. The same was true for gambling related incidents such as employees missing work (2% of employers), late for work (3% of employers) or caught stealing from the company or a client to cover costs from gambling (1% of employers). Employers were more likely to report that workers arrived late for work or took too many breaks because of their smoking (19%), or that they were caught smoking on the job in an area where smoking is not allowed (11%). In general, union representatives were more likely than employers to report awareness of such incidents involving union members.

RESPONSES TO AND SUPPORTS FOR EMPLOYEE SUBSTANCE USE AND GAMBLING

How do employers and co-workers respond to employees with substance use or gambling problems? In general employees were supportive and did not enable a co-worker with substance abuse or gambling problems. Workers would respond by giving the person advice on dealing with the problem (45%), reporting the person to a supervisor (27%) or suggesting that the person get help (21%). Very seldom would they help a co-worker avoid getting caught (1%). For more information about developing a peer support program, refer to other topics in this series.

Employers would give workers warnings if they arrived at work hung-over (70% of employers) or for near misses involving alcohol or drugs (45%). They would give suspensions to employees arriving at work drunk or high (42%) and dismiss employees if their substance use caused an injury to others (56%) or damaged property (37%). For more information on dealing with the troubled employee, refer to other topics in this series.

If an employee needed treatment for substance use problems, employers and union representative in the study said they would provide support in a variety of ways. While unions members would most likely receive sick leave with full pay (51% down from 65% in 1992) or partial pay (34% up from 18% in 1992), employers would most likely give their workers sick leave without pay (50% up from 35% in 1992). Employers were less likely to dismiss an employee requiring treatment in 2002 (11%) than in 1992 (20%). Larger organizations with the highest operating budget and headquarters located outside of Canada were more likely than smaller ones to offer sick leave with partial or full pay. For more information about supporting an employee with addiction problems, refer to other topics in this series.

Another way to get help for addiction problems for the employee, and in some cases their families, is through employee assistance programs (EAPs) and member assistance programs (MAPs). Availability of these programs has increased (EAPs 28% in 2002 up from 9%) and unions (EAPs 90% in 2002 up from 72%). Again, larger organizations were more likely than smaller ones to provide EAPs. Employers' reasons for not providing EAPs were that they thought their organization was too small (59%) or their organization did not need one (54%). Those who had access to EAPs saw them as effective (92% of employees, 83% of union representatives).

One important way of dealing with substance use and gambling in the workplace is to have formal policies on employee alcohol and drug use. More employers said their organizations have alcohol policies (61%) or drug policies (68%) in 2002 that in 1992, when 29% had policies on alcohol and/or drugs. This suggests that in the past 10 years workplaces have grown increasingly aware of alcohol and drug issues and have taken positive steps to address these concerns. Employers also said their organizations have tobacco use policies (50%) and gambling policies (11%). White-collar sectors (education, hospitals/health care, social services, public administration) were more likely than resource or labour-based sectors (utilities, agriculture, transportation, wholesale/retail trade) to report having tobacco policies. For more information about developing alcohol, drug or tobacco policies, refer to other topics in this series.

One way that employers approach employee alcohol and drug use is with testing. More employers in 2002 reported that they used testing in their organizations (8% up from 1% in 1992). One third of these employers thought testing was effective in dealing with alcohol use problems in the workplace (32% up from 10% in 1992) and drug use problems in the workplace (37% up from 27% in1992). Again, larger organizations were more likely than smaller organizations to use alcohol or drug testing. The majority of these testing programs were testing after accidents, testing on referral by a supervisor who noticed performance problems, testing after a near miss or pre-employment testing. Safety sensitive industries, such as forestry/mining (75%), upstream oil/gas (46%), transportation (33%) and construction (23%) were most likely to use alcohol/drug testing. AADAC does not recommend employee alcohol and drug testing except in cases where alcohol or other drug use is a genuine risk to workplace operations or public safety. For more information about setting up alcohol or drug testing, refer to other topics in this series.

The information provided by the results of the 2002 study can help Alberta businesses to understand patterns of substance abuse and workplace use, look at programs and policies to support those affected by such use, identify the workplace characteristics that might contribute to harmful use or problem gambling and help establish healthier work environments. For more information about workplace health and wellness, refer to other topics in this series.

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For more information

AADAC (Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission) offers a range of services to assist businesses in managing workplace substance use and gambling concerns. These services include

Information/Resources • Besides the *It's Our Business Information Series*, AADAC offers several resources for workplace leaders and employees.

The *It's Our Business* manual gives leaders in the workplace the information they need to build a healthy, well-functioning workplace team. This practical, well-organized binder offers clear information and insightful advice in an easy-to-follow format, based on a philosophy of fitness for work. Employers and managers are advised to remain focused on what is their business: the employee's ability to do his or her job.

To supplement the manual, AADAC offers three brochures to inform employees and enlist them as allies in creating a workplace that is free from the problems created by the abuse of alcohol, other drugs and gambling:

- *Is Drinking, Using Drugs or Gambling Affecting My Work?* helps employees to assess whether their work is being affected by their substance use or gambling and offers suggestions on finding further help.
- *Someone at Work Has a Problem* guides employees in intervening with a co-worker who may have an alcohol, other drug or gambling problem by outlining workplace indicators and tips for a successful intervention.
- *What You Need to Know About Fitness for Work* outlines the concept of fitness for work, and describes how substance use and gambling affect fitness for work, what an employee can do to be fit for work, and what one can do when others are not fit for work.

For more information on these and other resources from AADAC, call 310-0000/780-427-7319 (in Alberta) or 1-800-280-9616 or check the website at www.aadac.com

Employer Consultations • If you are concerned about an employee's substance use or gambling and would like to discuss strategies to intervene, contact the AADAC office nearest you.

Client Services • AADAC's network of services offers information sessions, assessment, individual and group counselling, and intensive treatment to any Albertan concerned about a substance use or gambling problem. Contact the nearest AADAC office for information.

Treatment Programs for Employees • The AADAC Business and Industry Clinic offers residential treatment programs specifically for the workplace. Located at the Northern Addictions Centre in Grande Prairie, the clinic offers a complete range of services to meet the needs of employees with substance abuse or gambling problems, as well as the needs of the referring party. Services include detoxification, a 30-day alcohol and drug program, a 50-day cocaine program, a family program and extensive follow-up programs. For more information, call 780-538-6316 or 1-800-419-1149.

Training for the Workplace • AADAC offers training to assist businesses in addressing substance abuse and gambling in the workplace. Training topics include understanding addiction, alcohol and drug policy development, and supervisory training on dealing with the troubled employee. Workshops can be custom designed and delivered at the worksite. For more information, contact your local AADAC area office.

AADAC
ALBERTA ALCOHOL AND
DRUG ABUSE COMMISSION

For more information, contact your local AADAC office,
call 1-866-33AADAC or visit our website at www.aadac.com

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ISBN 0-7785-3245-3